

GULF OF MEXICO PROGRAM OFFICE

FUNDING GUIDANCE



FY 2005 WATER QUALITY COOPERATIVE AGREEMENTS

Summary: The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) through the Gulf of Mexico Program Office (GMPO) is soliciting preproposals from state water pollution control agencies, interstate agencies, tribes, and other public or nonprofit private agencies, institutions and organizations interested in applying for Federal assistance for Water Quality Cooperative Agreements. For Fiscal Year 2005, the Program expects to allocate approximately \$2M to fund projects that support the restoration of impaired water bodies including coastal and marine habitat protection, restoration, and enhancement in priority coastal areas. Supplemental awards of existing projects are eligible to compete with proposals for new projects. Preproposals must be submitted by electronic mail by January 31, 2003, for Gulfwide projects or by the dates set for each of the Gulf States for the State Meetings. The announcements for the State Meetings will be posted on the website at www.epa.gov/gmpo.

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1. Introduction

Water Quality Cooperative Agreements are authorized by the Clean Water Act Section 104 (b) (3) 33 U. S. C. 1254(b)(3) [Public Law 100-4], which authorizes EPA/GMPO to award Water Quality Cooperative Agreements to conduct and promote the coordination and acceleration of research, investigations, experiments, training, demonstrations, surveys, and studies relating to the causes, effects, extent, prevention, reduction, and elimination of pollution. This federal financial assistance program is identified in the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance as CFDA #66.475.

The Gulf of Mexico Program Office Funding Guidance (Guidance) is a resource to assist the consortium of Gulf State, Federal, and non-governmental organizations which together constitute the Gulf of Mexico Program (GMP). It identifies priorities recommended by the GMP Policy Review Board (a Federal Advisory Committee to EPA) and the funding priorities

agreed to by the GMPO. This Guidance also describes the funding and decision process for projects to be funded during fiscal year 2005.

2. Purpose

The purpose of the Gulf of Mexico Program is to protect and restore the health and productivity of the Gulf of Mexico in ways consistent with the economic well being of the region. Our mission is to protect, restore, and enhance the coastal and marine waters of the Gulf and its natural habitats; to sustain living resources; to protect human health and the food supply; and to ensure the long term use of the Gulf shores, beaches, and waters. To carry out this mission, we must develop and maintain a partnership of State and Federal agencies, local governments, academia, regional business and industry, agricultural and environmental organizations, and individual citizens and communities that effectively addresses the complex ecological problems that cross State, Federal, and international jurisdictions and boundaries.

By publishing the Funding Guidance, GMPO seeks to:

- implement our mission by fostering development of appropriate projects and actions;
- achieve specific objectives and annual performance goals established by the GMPO;
- maximize the opportunity for developing joint partnerships between agencies and non-governmental organizations to achieve common environmental objectives;
- enable Gulf State agencies to provide guidance to facilitate the submission of preproposals for projects in Priority Coastal Areas;
- identify joint priorities so that GMP partners can use them in internal planning and so that project proposals can be targeted to opportunities that will achieve the most significant environmental improvement in each of our Priority Coastal Areas or on a Gulf-wide or Statewide basis;
- provide a fair and open competition process for selecting and funding the best projects based on merit and cost-effectiveness, thereby more effectively achieving program objectives; and
- reduce the administrative burden associated with competing for individual project funding at various, unpredictable times throughout the fiscal year.

3. Eligibility Criteria and Priorities

- a. ***Eligible Applicants.*** State water pollution control agencies, interstate agencies, Tribes, colleges and universities, and other public or nonprofit private agencies and organizations are eligible to submit project proposals.

b. ***Eligible Project Areas.***

(1) Place-based Projects: Projects must be implemented within the GMP 12 Priority Coastal Areas of the Gulf of Mexico in the states of Alabama, Florida, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Texas (**Figure 1**). To be eligible, the project area must be within a watershed that contains one or more priority water bodies identified on a 303(d) List of Impaired Waters.

FIGURE 1: Priority Coastal Areas

- 1. Lower Laguna Madre**
- 2. Texas Coastal Bend & Bays**
- 3. Galveston Bay**
- 4. Barataria-Terrebonne Bays**
- 5. Lake Pontchartrain**
- 6. Mississippi Coastal Basins**
- 7. Mobile Bay**
- 8. Pensacola Bay**
- 9. Lower Suwannee River**
- 10. Tampa Bay**
- 11. Sarasota Bay**
- 12. Charlotte Harbor**

(2) Gulf-Wide Projects: Projects should have a broad, regional, large ecosystem, or multiple Gulf States perspective and support one or more of the GMP objectives.

(3) Projects in Lower Mississippi River and its Tributaries (Figure 2): Projects must be implemented within the Lower Mississippi River in Louisiana or Mississippi or the Lower Mississippi River tributaries in those States and support implementation of the *Action Plan for Reducing, Controlling, and Mitigating Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico*.

Figure 2:Lower Mississippi River and its Tributaries



c. ***Eligible Activities.***

(1) Place-based, watershed protection activities led by State and local communities to reduce pollution at the source and to protect and restore important habitat in coastal watersheds, estuaries, and near-shore areas including watershed planning, monitoring and modeling; implementing demonstration projects for pollution control or habitat restoration; or facilitating public outreach.

Priority will be given to watersheds with established implementation plans for improving or restoring water quality (e.g., National Estuary Program Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans); and to place-based projects which actively involve stakeholders and focus on one of the following program areas:

Improving water quality in the 12 priority coastal areas (**Figure 1**), specifically for those waters identified as impaired by Gulf States in accordance with Section 303(d) of the Clean Water Act, in order to protect public health and restore the full range of beneficial uses; and/or

Restoring and protecting important marine habitats that are essential to the recreational and commercial fisheries of the Gulf, including the prevention and control of invasive aquatic species.

(2) Gulf-wide initiatives, such as, monitoring and assessment, education, public outreach, or policy development, that are designed to deliver information, technical expertise, and/or financial resources in support of State and local actions to achieve a desired outcome or develop a particular capability.

Priority will be given to Gulfwide projects which actively involve stakeholders and focus on the following program area:

Protecting public health by supporting educational efforts targeted at high risk consumers concerning the dangers of naturally-occurring pathogens, supporting State efforts to detect, track, and report harmful algal bloom events, and assisting Gulf States and coastal communities to provide compatible fish consumption advisories regarding the health effects of methylmercury;

(3) Lower Mississippi River and its tributaries

Priority will be given to projects in the Lower Mississippi River or its tributaries in the States of Louisiana and Mississippi which actively involve stakeholders and focus on the following program area:

Reducing nutrient loading in the lower Mississippi River and its tributaries and implementing coordinated monitoring, modeling, and research in order to implement the *Action Plan for Reducing, Controlling, and Mitigating Hypoxia in the Northern Gulf of Mexico*.

Projects must meet the following criteria to be considered for funding:

- T **be consistent with the CWA Section 104(b)(3) authority;**
- T **address GMP priorities (Section 3) and support GMP objectives and subobjectives (Appendix 1);**
- T **promote public-private partnerships and leverage other public and private funding;**
- T **provide a clear articulation of project outcomes and impacts, and how information will be used/shared with the public; and**
- T **employ approaches or achieve results that are transferable to other regions of the Gulf of Mexico.**

Further priority will be given to activities that directly support existing implementation plans to improve or restore water quality. In recognition that the Gulf States of Texas, Louisiana, Alabama, and Florida have identified estuaries of national significance through the National Estuary Program that merit special attention and management action, the GMP will build upon these locally-led, community-based initiatives and support implementation of their Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plans. In order to receive maximum benefits from the limited funds available, priority will be given to projects which build capacity to protect the watershed, and projects which result in methodologies or outputs that can be used in other watersheds.

4. Project Budget Periods.

Project budget periods will not exceed two years. For planning purposes applicants can assume an award date of October 15, 2004, and a project completion date of October 14, 2006. GMPO will work with successful applicants to adjust these dates as needed prior to award of funds.

5. Preproposal Format

An example Preproposal Format is provided in **Appendix 2** or can be found on our website at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo>.

Preproposals should be of sufficient length to adequately describe the project and how it addresses each of the criteria provided in Section 3. Other attachments are not required at the preproposal stage. Include the following numbered components in the order shown and under the headings that follow:

1. Project Title - No more than 60 characters.

2. Requesting Agency/Organization - Organization Name, Address, and Type (i.e., State or Interstate Agency or Commission; Sub-state or special purpose district; County; Municipality; Federal Agency; College or University; Tribal Organization; Individual; Federally funded research or development center; Private non-profit organization; or Other with description provided).

3. Point of Contact - Name, Title, Phone Number, FAX Number, and Email address.

4. Applicable Objectives - Identify the GMP Objectives to which this project applies.

5. Applicable Priority Coastal Area - Identify the Priority Coastal Area to which this project applies or indicate if the Project is applicable Gulf-Wide.

6. Applicable National Estuary Program - If this project supports a Gulf NEP workplan or Comprehensive Conservation and Management Plan identify the NEP.

Watershed or Basin Implementation Plan. Identify the watershed restoration implementation plan (title, author, and date) which the project supports. Explain how the proposed project supports implementation of the plan.

7. Applicable Project Impact Area(s) - Identify the applicable: County(ies); City(ies); eight digit hydrologic unit code(s); and impaired waterbodies/segments appropriate for the watersheds most affected by this project. If the project is broadly applicable simply identify it as a “Gulf-wide” project or a “State-wide” project.

8. State and/or Local Community-Based Collaborators - List key stakeholders (other government agencies or NGOs). Evidence of support (e.g., letters) may be requested for full proposals.

Roles and Responsibilities. Describe the roles and responsibilities of key personnel involved in implementing the proposed project. If the project is dependent on technical assistance from GMPO, explain.

9. Project Description - Provide a 2-3 paragraph synopsis that effectively describes the major actions to be taken and the outcomes expected to be achieved by this project.

Water Quality Impairment. Briefly describe the water quality impairment, including a

reference to a 303(d) List of Impaired Waters . Include the title, date, and page number of references.

10. Eligible Funding Criteria - Specify how this project meets the funding criteria outlined in Section 3 of this guidance.

11. Project Description - Provide an explanation of how this project addresses each of the Priority Objectives / Subobjectives identified in Section 9.

12. Community Education & Outreach - State if there is an education/outreach component. If applicable, describe the target audience and the means to be used to reach the target audience.

13. Milestones - Include a table specifying milestones/final products and projected due dates (by quarter).

14. Project Duration - Specify project duration from 6 months up to 2 years.

15. Estimated Project Costs - Provide the current estimate for (1) the **total** project value, (2) the amount requested from GMPO, and (3) the other funds that will be provided to implement this project if awarded.

Budget by activity or workplan component. Indicate the amount of GMPO funds and nonfederal match funds to be expended on each activity. Examples of workplan components could include water quality modeling, water quality monitoring, etc.

Note: Funding is not assured for subsequent years. Indicate the amount requested per year if multiple years.

16. Project Budget Information - The application form contains an embedded Excel spreadsheet for the purpose of detailing the budget for this project. The spreadsheet software is automatically activated by double-clicking anywhere within the cells of the spreadsheet template. Fill in each applicable cell of the spreadsheet. The total budget (e.g., “Total All Project Funding Sources” cell) should equal the total Estimated Project Costs identified in Item 16.

6. Other Considerations: Please note the following before preproposals are developed:

Ineligible Activities - GMPO will not fund under this Guidance routine construction projects, such as, installing centralized or decentralized sewage treatment systems; land acquisition; or projects that are largely general education/outreach or conferences unless they meet a clear need established by the Gulf States, GMP Policy Review Board or Management Committee, or GMPO.

Additional Funds - Applicants seeking additional funding under an existing award must also apply.

Matching Requirements - There is no matching requirement; however, one of the evaluation criteria requires partnerships and leverage funding. Nonfederal match is strongly encouraged,

and may be provided in the form of cash or in-kind services, such as staffing. Nonfederal match will be calculated as follows: *nonfederal share divided by total project costs x 100*

Quality Assurance/Peer Review - *An approved quality assurance plan will be required for any project involving environmental data collection activities prior to the commencement of data collection and reporting.* Depending on the scientific basis of the work conducted, draft products may be subject to peer review before the final product is accepted.

Project Clarification/Revisions - Applicants may be contacted for clarification and for the purpose of negotiating changes in project terms and amounts.

Confidentiality - Preproposal information will not be kept confidential.

Multiple Preproposals - An applicant may submit multiple preproposals. If one organization submits more than one preproposal, we request that a single, coordinated package accompanied by a transmittal letter is provided. The transmittal letter should indicate an overall Contact Person (including telephone number, e-mail, and address) and, ideally, *a ranking of preproposals in priority order with an explanation of the ranking.*

Additional Questions. Include responses to the following questions:

- Is this a continuation of a previously funded project? If so, provide the title, assistance agreement number, and project status.
- Will the project build capacity to protect the watershed? If yes, explain.
- Will the project result in data on the effectiveness of best management practices to improve or protect water quality? If yes, explain.
- Can the methodology, results, or lessons learned from this project be transferred to other watersheds? If yes, explain.
- Will the project involve the collection of identical information from ten or more persons? If yes, briefly describe the type of information to be collected, target audience, and how the information will be used. Proposed projects that include the survey or collection of identical information from ten or more persons are subject to the provisions of the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995. Before collection of information can be initiated, EPA is required to obtain clearance from the United States Office of Management and Budget, which is likely to delay project start dates.

7. Preproposal Evaluation and Selection Process

- **Initial Screening and Disqualification.** There are several conditions which will result in disqualification. Proposals sent by electronic mail after the established deadline dates; proposals will be disqualified if the abstract does **not** explain how the project area meets the eligibility criteria provided in Section 3.b., Eligible Project Areas. Finally, proposals submitted by ineligible applicants and proposals that suggest inappropriate procurement procedures such as preselection of contractors will be disqualified.
- **Preproposal Evaluation:** The following steps will be followed for evaluating

preproposals:

- (1) An initial evaluation and ranking of place-based preproposals will be conducted at the State meetings convened for presentation of the preproposals. A multi-vote process is conducted by the representatives of State and local agencies, environmental and business/industry organizations or groups, universities, Citizen Advisory Committee members, and other groups engaged in managing coastal watersheds and marine resources in the State.
 - (2) Following the initial State evaluation of the place-based projects, the place-based as well as the Gulf-wide preproposals will be evaluated by the GMP Focus Teams and the GMPO staff priority area leads and project officers based on the criteria provided in Section 3 and ranked according to the total score.
 - (3) An overall score and ranking from the State Meetings (for place-based projects only), Focus Teams, and staff will then be developed and provided to the GMPO Director. The GMPO Director selects the final list of projects for funding. The GMPO Director will then discuss the selected preproposals with the State Management Committee Leads. Any preproposal is subject to review and comment by the GMP Policy Review Board or Management Committee. Final project selection will be made by the Director of the Gulf of Mexico Program Office. EPA reserves the right to reject all proposals and make no awards. Final determinations and notification of the award to the applicant will be made by EPA Region 4 Office of Policy and Management.
- ***Ranking Factors.*** Key ranking factors and their relative weights are as follows:

Priority Project Area: 20% of the total weight will be based on the extent to which the project area is consistent with priorities identified in Section 3, Eligible Project Areas.

Priority Activity: 25% of the total weight will be placed on the extent to which the proposed project addresses priorities identified in Section 3, Eligible Activities.

Likelihood of Success: 15% of the total weight will be based on extent to which the proposal demonstrates that the applicant has the ability and/or qualifications to implement the project; the appropriate players are involved; and the roles and responsibilities of key personnel are clear.

Budget: 10% of the total weight will be based on the information presented to explain and justify the amount of funds requested.

Approach or Methodology: 10% of the total weight will be based on the information presented on the approach or methodology to be used to achieve project objectives, and the extent to which it is clearly explained and technically sound.

Outputs, Anticipated Outcomes, and Milestones: 10% of the total weight will be based on the extent to which the proposal clearly describes reasonable project outputs, expected outcomes, and milestones.

Public-Private Partnerships: 5% of the total weight will be placed on the extent to which

the applicant is actively involved in promoting public-private partnerships and leveraging other public and private funding;

Transferability/Information Sharing: 5% of the total weight will be based on how information will be used/shared with the public; and how project will employ approaches or achieve results that are transferable to other regions of the Gulf of Mexico.

8. Notification of Applicants

By October 31, 2003, GMPO anticipates notifying all applicants of the status of their proposals. Successful applicants will be provided instructions for submitting a grant application (Standard Form 424A & B, Application for Federal Assistance), supporting information, and a final workplan. The GMPO web site provides an electronic application package and instructions which successful applicants will be required to follow to receive a Cooperative Agreement. This web site can be accessed at <http://www.epa.gov/gmpo/>.

Please note that selection of a preproposal is not a guarantee of funding for the project.

9. Preproposal Submittal Instructions and Point of Contact

Address - All preproposals should be submitted electronically to: car.gloria@epa.gov

Hard copies may be sent (but only if email is not available) to:

Attention: Gloria Car

Gulf of Mexico Program Office

Mail Code: EPA/GMPO

Stennis Space Center, MS 39529

Questions may be directed to Gloria Car, car.gloria@epa.gov or 228/688-2421

10. Schedule of Activities

This is the estimated schedule of activities for review of proposals and notification of selections:

January-February, 2003	Gulf State Meetings will be held. Deadlines for preproposals will be given with notification of each State Meeting. Meetings will be announced on the website at www.epa.gov/gmpo .
September 30, 2003	GMPO selects proposals and notifies applicants.
TBD	Successful applicants submit final workplans and grant application packages to GMPO.
October 15, 2004	EPA awards Water Quality Cooperative Agreements.

- * If the grant is awarded later than October 15, 2004, project completion dates will be adjusted to allow a two-year project period.